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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1094
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFIUU/NAVMEDIACEN BCST DET SOUDA BAY GR PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 000124

SIPDIS

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NSC ALSO FOR MARIA GERMANO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: DEATH OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS AND ALL GREECE
AND THE SUCCESSION PROCESS

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) The Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, Christodoulos, passed away at 0515 local time on Monday, January 28. His funeral is expected to take place on Thursday, January 31 -- or possibly Friday, February 1. The Archbishop played a social and political role, and his successor is expected to do likewise. His death sets in motion a centuries-old process of burial and selection of his successor. Following the funeral, the ruling body of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Permanent Holy Synod, will convene to select the next Archbishop in accord with both Greek Orthodox canon law and the Hellenic Republic's constitutional law. We do not anticipate that any of his potential successors will lead the Church in different directions on key issues. End summary.

CHRISTODOULOS: A CONSERVATIVE MODERNIZER

12. (U) The Most Blessed Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece died at his home this morning at 0515 local time from complications of cancer after nearly ten years as the senior prelate of the Orthodox Church of Greece. He was 169. At his election in April 1998, when he was 59 years of age, Christodoulos was the youngest man ever chosen to serve as the senior Archbishop of Greece. Hailed as an innovator, Christodoulos quickly set about modernizing the Church and making his voice heard on a host of social and political issues -- in sharp contrast to his apolitical predecessor Seraphim. Christodoulos vehemently opposed the NATO campaign to liberate Kosovo; he opposed (unsuccessfully) efforts to remove religion from state identity cards and (successfully) opposed the placement of a new mosque for Athens near the international airport where he said visitors to Greece might be confused as to whether Greece was an Islamic or a Christian country. Christodoulos also created the first Greek Orthodox Church Committee on Bioethics and launched new programs to treat a host of social ills including treatment for drug-addicts, support for single-mothers, abused women and immigrants, and care for victims of trafficking. He established a chain of nurseries and infant schools as well as an NGO, Solidarity, which permitted the Greek Orthodox Church to intervene in humanitarian matters in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and in Eastern Europe. He also sought improved relations with the Roman Catholic Church, hosting Pope John Paul II for an historic visit to Greece in 2001, the first visit of a pontiff to Greece in more than a thousand years. Christodoulos reciprocated by visiting the Pope at the Vatican in 2006. Both visits brought outcries from some ultra-traditionalist Orthodox believers.

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

¶3. (U) Upon the Archbishop's death, a (literally) Byzantine process of preparing for his funeral and, thereafter, to select his predecessor begins immediately. First is the preparation of the Archbishop's body followed by three days of official mourning, during which the Archbishop lies in state at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Athens. The Archbishop's remains have already been transferred to the Cathedral, and public viewing has begun. On the fourth or fifth day after death, there is a funeral at the Cathedral and burial at the First Cemetery of Athens. The Archbishop's funeral is expected to take place on Thursday, January 31, @gh it is possible that it could be on Friday, February ¶1. The funeral will likely be presided over by His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarchate Bartholomew I as was requested by Christodoulos.

THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR A SUCCESSOR

¶4. (U) Because the Eastern Orthodox Church of Greece is "the prevailing" religion of the Hellenic Republic, there is a symbiotic relationship between it and the Greek state. Indeed, the procedure for electing a new Archbishop is codified in public law number 590/1977 and requires the presence of the Minister of Education and Religions during the otherwise secret election of a new Archbishop.

¶5. (U) According to the succession law, upon the passing of the Archbishop, the senior Metropolitan (an exalted level of Bishop) becomes the Archbishop, ad interim, and takes command of the Permanent Holy Synod -- the ruling body of the Church of Greece. The senior bishop is determined by calculating

ATHENS 00000124 002 OF 002

age and length of service. At the direction of the Archbishop, a.i., the Permanent Holy Synod is convened within a maximum of five days after the death of the Archbishop. (NOTE: At present, the two most senior Metropolitans in Greece are of advanced age and seriously ill. Therefore the role of senior Archbishop has been filled by Seraphim, Metropolitan of Karysteia, third in seniority. End note.) The Permanent Holy Synod has been convened for January 28 at 1400 local time.

¶6. (U) The Permanent Holy Synod then makes preparations to convene the Plenary Session of the Holy Synod, comprised of all the Metropolitans of Greece. The Plenary Session must be convened within twenty days of the death of the Archbishop. In order for the Plenary Session to elect a new Archbishop there must be a quorum present -- made up of two-thirds of the total number of Metropolitans. There are approximately 90 Metropolitans who will be eligible to vote for the successor to Christodoulos. If there is no quorum present, the Synod re-convenes the next day and a quorum is assumed, irrespective of the actual number of Metropolitans present, and the election proceeds.

THE ELECTION

¶7. (U) The election process begins with a special liturgy. Any voting member of the Synod may present his own name for election. Voting then takes place before a committee made up of the three senior Metropolitans. They, together with the Minister of Education and Religion, inspect the ballot box and place a seal upon it as prescribed by law. The youngest Metropolitans vote first, and voting is done by secret ballot. Each bishop writes the name of his chosen candidate on a piece of paper which is placed into an envelope and the envelope is placed into the ballot box. The next Archbishop is determined by a simple majority. If no clear winner is determined by the first round, two additional rounds are

permitted. However, if after the third round, no single candidate emerges as the winner, the Archbishop is selected by drawing lots. No breaks or intermissions are permitted during this process.

¶18. (U) The result of the election is communicated to the Ministry of Education and Religions in writing by the Permanent Holy Synod within five days of the election. A Presidential Decree is then issued to recognize the new Archbishop who then declares before the President of the Republic, the Permanent Synod and the Minister of Education and Religions his vow to protect and defend the laws of the Church and the Constitution, and an enthronement liturgy follows.

COMMENT

¶19. (U) While the law sets forth specific maximum time periods for each of the steps in the selection process, generally things move very quickly. By the fourth day after the death of the Archbishop, the funeral and burial should have already taken place. Within another two to three weeks, the Plenary Session will be convened and a new Archbishop will be elected. The results will be known immediately after the vote when the new Archbishop emerges from the building where the vote takes place (Ioannou Gennadiou -- the permanent seat of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece) and announces his election to the large crowd of gathered faithful and members of the press.

¶10. (SBU) (Comment continued) At present, there are four or five main contenders for the position of the next Archbishop of Athens and All Greece. They are from the dioceses of Thessaloniki, Spart, Attica, Volos and Zakynthos. It is not known, however, how many candidates will ultimately engage in the election process as any bishop may nominate himself. In any case, we deem it unlikely that the next Archbishop will lead the church in different directions on key issues. End Comment.
SPECKHARD